

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL NORA LINDERMAN, USA, CHIEF OF THE ARMY LONG TERM FAMILY CASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 2:00 P.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2007

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): And this is Jack. Who's joining us? (No audible response.)

Hello, this is Jack. Who's joining us?

LT. COL. KEVIN ARATA (U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Public Affairs Office): Jack, this is Kevin Arata and Lieutenant Colonel Nora Linderman.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Welcome aboard. Glad to have you here.

Let me see. We've got Andi with Andi's World and SpouseBUZZ on-line with us, along with Bruce McQuain from QandO, and we may have one or two more joining us here as we go along. We'll see as they come up, but I suppose we could just go ahead and get started. LT. COL. ARATA: Okay.

MR. HOLT: And I'd like to welcome Lieutenant Colonel Nora Linderman to the bloggers roundtable this morning -- or this afternoon, excuse me, and thank you very much for being with us this afternoon, Colonel.

And do you have an opening statement for us?

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Yes, I'm glad to be here. Thanks for allowing me to talk with you about the Army Long Term Family Case Management.

When I was asked to lead the Army Long Term Family Case Management Office, I seized the opportunity to ensure that families of the fallen had access to assistance in the months and years ahead. I'm humbled and I'm honored to utilize my personal and professional experiences to serve my fellow soldiers' families.

Army Long Term Family Case Management provides personalized support and advocacy to all loved ones of a fallen soldier for as long as that person needs it. Additionally, the program manages the disbursement of any new retroactively applied Army and government benefits and entitlements. Although I'm a career soldier now -- I was in both married to active component, and as a reservist mobilized -- I understand what families go through because the Army is a family tradition for many generations.

And I lost my father back in '69, and I recently lost my mother as a veteran in 2001. And it's a different world. Being able to be there the support structure for the families in the months and years after the loss is a wonderful step in the right direction, but it's just not about my experiences. My team and I are constantly listening to families, learning what they need, enhancing and expanding our program accordingly, so that we can do whatever it is that is required.

I encourage anyone who's suffered a loss to lean on us. We can help them work through the benefits, the applications, records, a number of different pursuits. We can even give them referrals to programs. There are some wonderful civilian and private organizations that can provide some support and peer group mentoring that we can't.

What I've come to learn, though, is that families don't know what they don't know. And it's a hard time for the families.

We reach out to them after about six months from the time of loss to ask them if there's any questions that they have, to see how they're doing. And we'd like to keep an open dialogue with them until everything is as -- let me rephrase that -- everything is satisfactory with them.

And on behalf of the Army, I want to extend my heartfelt condolences to families on the loss of their loved ones. You know, the Army's not forgotten their sacrifice, and they'll always be in my prayers. And my team at Army Long Term Family Case Management will always stand ready to serve the families.

I'm sure you have questions for me.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Yes, ma'am, I believe we do.

Bruce McQuain with QandO. Why don't get us started, Bruce?

Q Okay. Colonel Linderman, Bruce McQuain with QandO. My assumption is, you sort of pick up where the survivor assistance officer leaves off with the family. Could you possibly step us through what you would consider to be a typical case, if there is such a thing? (Chuckles.)

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Well, there is -- yeah, I was going to say there is no better word to use than "typical." But on average, the casualty assistance officer in the Army stays with the family at least through interment. You know, some families are more savvy than others. Some have more dynamics involved than others. But the casualty assistance officer will more or less start to disengage when the initial benefits and insurances are paid; paperwork has been, you know, filled out and processed. But even at that point in time, there may be some issues that take longer.

A case in point: When minors are involved, the majority of states do not use guardianship to be synonymous with conservatorship of the minors' money, and it's a separate court action that the guardian has to petition in order to receive funds that are earmarked for the minor.

That has been known to take months, you know, at which point the Long Term Family Case Management will kick in and will help the family throughout that time, make sure they get the benefits whenever the court officially names the conservator, and that all the loops are closed.

But barring anything unique like that, casualty assistance and case management is more or less complete in three to four months after date of loss.

You know, we give them time to regroup, have time for their thought processes to be less numb and to re-engage, and reach out to them at about the six-month mark because by then, they just might have more questions or concerns.

Q Now is that -- I would assume too then that a case officer of some sort is assigned and works that particular case.

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Oh, absolutely, when we do the outreach phone calls, sir, there's some that don't want to talk to us at all, and we respect that. But those that do talk to us, and they do have questions or concerns or something that we'll follow through on, that same support coordinator will stay with that family, absolutely. They don't get tossed around between different people or between different offices, you know, unless it involves like a FOIA request, a Freedom of Information Act request, where they have to interact themselves. We're trying to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Q Thanks.

MR. HOLT: And Andi.

Q I really don't have a question. I had the privilege of interviewing Colonel Linderman for Spouse Buzz Talk Radio last week, so we went over this program in detail. But for Bruce's benefit and for the benefit of the transcript, Colonel Linderman, it might be important to point out a good point that you made in our interview last week. And that is that entitlements and legislation and benefits change all the time, so it's probably a good idea to check your website regularly.

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Yes, absolutely right, Andi. See, what part of my -- my office has also become responsible for disbursement of retroactive benefits. Case in point: the death gratuity, the Serviceman's Group Life Insurance. When that was up, our office reached back to previous beneficiaries that were entitled to these new amounts, and that's hard. In today's dynamics in the world, people move. But we tracked down, I think, just a little over 5,000 beneficiaries and made the disbursement, but there's still a few hundred out there that we just cannot locate so far.

You know, we're not going to give up. You know, they're entitled to this benefit, and it would really help if people who became aware of us monitored our website, which -- I'll remind people. It's altfcm, our acronym, .army.mil. They don't have to engage with us. But if they just monitor our website, we'll keep people up to date if there's any more legislative changes or modifications on benefits that they can be entitled to. We reach out and talk to them and find them help, then fill out the paperwork. You don't know what's coming down the pike.

MR. HOLT: Okay, and we've got plenty of time here unless -- so we can just open this up for discussion.

Bruce, any other follow-up questions, or anything else you got?

Q No, I read Colonel Linderman's bio and I just wanted to say hello to a fellow reservist. I retired a while ago but I was with the 87th Division up in Birmingham. (Laughter.)

I wanted to actually ask her, how long has this particular department been in existence?

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Okay, I'll give you a brief background on that.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2006 got the then secretary of the Army, Harvey, to start this directive in February of '06. We stood up at that time, and it took until about April, into May, for us to get fully operational. So I would say 18 months we've been in existence. And in all this time and in all my interactions with families, fellow services, just about everybody from most walks of life, I haven't found one dissenter to what our mission is.

You know, this is being well-received and certainly well-needed. The families need the support. They've certainly earned the respect for being a military family, and we need to fulfill our trust to the soldiers to make sure they're taken care of in the long-term.

I don't think anyone really appreciated that when we stood up in February of 2006, that the office would make sure that there was over \$440 million dispersed to over 4,000 beneficiaries in one year, but that's part of our retroactive initiative. That's what we've done. And we've had over 2,000 cases reviewed where inquiries have come in from various next of kin or beneficiaries, and we've been able to provide resolution on pretty near all of them, and I'm proud to say that. I'm sure there's more that we can do, and I'd love to get feedback from the families. We may not be the same three years from now. Maybe our mission will grow to encompass more services to the family, I can't say.

Q That's phenomenal.

Q Lieutenant (sic/Lieutenant Colonel) Linderman, do you -- speaking of -- and I didn't ask you this last week -- do you offer a -- some type of, I don't know, post-case management survey to the families that you assist?

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Yes, that's part of our outreach. When we contact the families, the primary next of kin and secondary next of kin, we ask them if they'd be willing to provide us some feedback about what they've been through and the process, and it's a two-way street. We want to hear what has Casualty & Mortuary Affairs been doing right, because they've been making great strides to improve services and adapt services. And it's good to know that the training is on the right track, and on this left side, it's good to hear where there's areas that need some more concentration or maybe some ideas. We welcome any type of feedback that the families want to offer to us, absolutely.

And we do take and report all comments the families make to us within that survey. We just don't filter out all the bad so only the good goes up. We want to hear all comments and feedback.

And people that we have contacted that did not want to provide feedback, we're certainly willing to -- we'll take any of their feedback through our website, on e-mail or if they want to call us, even if -- when we made the contact, they weren't ready or didn't care to at that time.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anyone else? Any other questions? Q No, I'm good, thanks.

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: What I want to make clear to everybody, if I can, is that, you know, we serve the active duty soldiers -- not necessarily active component. You can be Reserve -- you can be a Reservist, you can be a Guardsman. If a death occurred on active duty, we're here to serve the family.

And I know that some states offer benefits to their Guardsmen even when they're not on status.

But if there's any military family that requires any type of referral or guidance to get in touch with peer support groups, grief counseling, bereavement, we'll still help them. I mean, one team, one military. You don't have to be active component in order to take advantage of what we have to offer. It doesn't matter what component you are; all the families deserve the dignity and respect, and we're there to help them in the months and years down the road.

Q That does bring up a question that I think I know the answer, but I just want to ask it anyway. I assume, then, you are covering all active component, not just necessarily battle casualties, but non-combat, et cetera?

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Oh, absolutely.

Q Yeah. This is just a carry-over from -- okay.

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: If a soldier's on active duty and trips up a curb or is lost to hostile fire, it doesn't matter.

Q Right.

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: That family has suffered a loss.

MR. HOLT: All right, very good. And once again, the website is [www.army -- or a-l-t-f-c-m.army.mil](http://www.army--or-a-l-t-f-c-m.army.mil)?

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Yes, sir. And our toll free number is 866- 272-5841.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Could we have that one more time?

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: 866-272-5841.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much.

Lieutenant Colonel Nora Linderman, with us for the Bloggers Roundtable today. Thank you very much for joining us. Great to hear about this program, and hopefully, we can have you back and kind of keep track of what's going on and what else we might be able to do and help you with.

LT. COL. LINDERMAN: Thank you. I appreciate that very much. I'm here anytime you need me. And I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you all today. Q Thanks very much.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, ma'am.

END.

